

# Successful mentoring programs begin with focus, training

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Mentoring programs for school-aged children have grown in the past two decades, but their effectiveness has not kept pace with their popularity. A study from the University of Houston College of Education finds school-based mentoring programs fail because they lack sufficient time, mentor training and a research foundation.

"While community-based mentoring programs have been shown to be effective, the largest form of mentoring—school-based mentoring—has produced small, null and sometimes harmful results," said Samuel D. McQuillin, assistant professor in the college's department of psychological, health and learning sciences. "We believe that one way to address this is by developing models of mentoring that are brief, effective and reproducible."

In his study "Brief Instrumental School-based Mentoring for Middle School Students: Theory and Impact," McQuillin presented findings from a series of revisions and evaluations of an "intentionally brief" school-based mentoring program. Their program is informed by social science theories (social cognitive theory, cognitive dissonance theory, motivational interviewing) and research in academic enablers.

"Middle school youth typically have decreased academic motivation and life satisfaction along with higher truancy than elementary students. Mentoring can play a significant role in combatting these," McQuillin said. "But nationally, very few programs provide meaningful training, which may prompt [mentors](#) to stop the program, leaving their mentees

with a sense of loss or even rejection."

In his study, 72 middle [school students](#) in an urban Houston charter school were divided, with about half receiving eight mentoring sessions over 12 weeks and the other group continuing with their regular school routine. Mentors applied for their positions and completed a mentor training program and performance test requirements. Training involved an online training module, in-person training on campus and the mentoring site. The mentoring sessions all were supervised by individuals who also received [training](#). After the three month program, students in the mentoring group saw increases in their math and English grades, compared with the students who did not receive the mentoring. Additionally, McQuillin says they reported more satisfaction with their life and fewer absences in school. Their results were based on school academic records, behavior records and [students](#) self-surveys on life satisfaction.

"This study provides promising evidence that brief, instrumental mentoring programs can improve [school](#)-relevant outcomes for [middle school students](#)," he said.

The study was published in the journal *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*.

Provided by University of Houston

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